THE SAW-DUST NUISANCE

IN THE RIVER OTTAWA.

MEMORANDUM

By ANTOINE RATTE.

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(*Assisted by R. J. Wicksteed, Attorney, &c.*)

OTTAWA, the Capital of the Dominion of Canada, is situate on the south bank of the Ottawa or Grand River, about 120 miles from its mouth, and about the same distance west of Montreal. This river is still affectionately known by the inhabitants of the Ottawa Valley under the proud name of "The Grand River." But this cognomen was given years ago, and affection is blind to the faults of the beloved one, for no person, looking down upon its surface—or where the surface ought to be—would call it a grand river, but rather a hard-worked mill-sluice or tail-race, so full is it of the refuse from the water-mills at the Chaudière Falls. This river is called, in foreign encyclopædias, "a noble stream," and "a bountiful and beautiful stream"—but then foreign dictionaries and gazeteers do not always exert themselves to procure the latest information about a river which is principally used to float saw-logs to the mills and there cut them up for the American market.

Tom Moore, the poet writes :

> "Utawa's tide! This trembling moon
> Shall see us float over thy surges soon"

But then Moore was a poet, and he wrote this about the year 1806, at which period it might have been possible to see the image of the satellite reflected from the trembling surface of the Ottawa. In the year of Our Lord 1886 the poet would have some trouble to find a spot on the river's surface sufficiently clear of muck to afford even as good a reflection as that of a boarding-house looking-glass. "To float over thy surges" now means to paddle on a few oases of comparatively clear water, divided by hideous deserts of saw-dust, slabs, laths, edgings and blocks, varied by the presence of an occasional escaped saw-log.

Into this mass the unhappy gondolier or canoeist, or sailor, plunges with a groan, and after some minutes of hard labour and perspiration he emerges with a strained boat, often a broken oar, and always a ruffled temper. Had the irascible St. Peter occasion to row over the Ottawa, from my boat-house, he would, I am sure, call down fire and brimstone upon the saw-mills at the Chaudière Falls. But we have now no

workers of miracles to help the oppressed, and the earthly saints who now move over this river, cannot move the powers that be by their maledictions or prayers. The lumbermen put some 1,500 votes into the opposite scale, and the saints are sent to—their everlasting rest.

Let us come down to figures: Twenty-two years ago I bought, and paid cash for, my present property, a water lot between Bolton and Cathcart streets adjoining the premises of the Ottawa River Navigation Company: a most desirable situation both as to land and water, when I purchased. I meant that this property should afford me, with my family, a living in my lifetime, and that, on my death, the business of waterman should be carried on by my family and son. Removing the mills as a factor in the computation, my judgment was correct. Had the river remained in the same condition as when I bought, what with the natural increase in the population and the growing taste for boating and water excursions, I would have more than doubled the value of my property and capital, and have died happy in the knowledge that my family were well provided for.

At the time of the removal of the Civil Service employees to Ottawa, when this city was made the Capital of the Dominion, no finer stretch of river navigation was to be found in America, than that presented by the River Ottawa in its reach from this city to Grenville, a distance of some sixty-five miles. The river was broad, the currents feeble, the water pure, the bottom and shores sandy, channel well lighted, the banks wooded and sylvan, no floating obstructions or rubbish, the scenery magnificent, and the fishing excellent. The special charm to all residents in and visitors to the, then, small city of Ottawa was undeniably boating on the broad bosom of the noble River Ottawa, which curves round the city of the same name. Every person owned, or owned in part, a boat, and the summer evenings saw the water covered with pretty craft filled with joyous crews. But soon all this changed. To an American eye a river is only created for feeding canals, and its rapids and falls only formed to drive mills. Several citizens of the neighbouring republic looked upon the Chaudière Falls, and behold they were seen to be very good—for driving saw-mills. These men seized the opportunity, became Canadian citizens—built mills—bought enormous tracts of pine lumber for a few dollars, and then the selfish race for wealth began. From official sources, I have ascertained that the number of logs of all descriptions cut at the Chaudière mills in 1866 amounted to only 966,322; whereas in 1884 they reached the enormous figure of 3,777,225, or an increase of 2,820,903 during that short period. What is the result? Boating is almost killed off; the water is polluted, and has to be filtered before using it for cooking purposes; sail-boats cannot plough their way through the rubbish floating down from the wasteful mills; steam-yachts foul their propeller wheels, and cannot plough their way through the wooden

crust; boats are upset by the oars catching in the blocks; oars break; persons have been drowned from mistaking the saw-dust accumulation for the dry ground, and many more fall into the water and are fished out with difficulty. My boat-house is being pressed down by the weight of saw-dust packed between its floats,—the floor will soon be awash. The bed of the river is fast becoming levelled up with the enormous quantity of saw-dust torn from the Canadian forest produce by the wasteful American saw-teeth. Sunday is now the only day when there is a chance for a boat to move at all. And why? Because the avaricious mill-owners are bound to respect the obligations of the Christian Sunday—no doubt grudgingly.

Let me show what are my private losses through this monopoly in lumber, and the unwarrantable privileges conferred on the mill-owners. Because it must be understood that the Government has specially exempted the Ottawa River for two miles from and below the Chaudière Falls from the operation of the River and Streams Protection Act, which prohibits the throwing in of mill refuse, etc. In the year 1867 I was mak ing two thousand dollars a year as a boatman and boat-house-keeper. Between the years 1874-78 I was making one thousand dollars. From the year 1879 to the present time I have been making only five hundred dollars a year—and this too with a better stock of boats and improved and enlarged boat-house. In the year 1870 I had deposited in the Ontario Bank three thousand four hundred dollars—which I have lost, and am in debt to the amount of four hundred dollars.

If the millers are determined to exact their pound of flesh from the Government, in return for driving their hordes of workmen to the polls to sustain any ministry which fills their money-bags, I must retire from business, and ask the millers to purchase my right and title, and recompense me for losses, etc.

If they are willing to settle on this basis, my claim stands as follows:—

For the Landed Property	$50,000
For the Boat-House and Boats . .	5,000
Damages from 1874 to 1878 . . .	5,000
Damages from 1879 to 1886 . . .	10,500
Money drawn from the Ontario Bank and expended	3,400
Debts owing at the present time . .	400
Total	$74,300

For this sum I would agree to bind myself to retire from the boating business, in any form, and hold the mill-owners harmless for the future.

If the manufacturers of saw-dust deny my just and reasonable claims for compensation, I must sue for damages in the

courts. Poor as I am I will not be deterred from this course, either by the cost to me or the knowledge that I am opposed to very wealthy men, whose interests are selfish, and whose power over our law makers is great.

The reasons given for a perpetuation of the saw-dust nuisance by the manufacturers of it are, chiefly, the following :—

The saw-mills have built Ottawa, and keep its population in food and clothing; the debris of four millions of logs is nothing when cast into such a mighty stream and a swift-running one; other rivers in our own and foreign countries are treated in a similar manner; the cost of alterations in the mills, necessary to admit of the saw-dust being carried away before reaching the water, would be so great as to preclude their adoption. The mills would virtually have to be rebuilt.

To these pleas I can shortly and easily reply by extracts from the report, dated February, 1873, of the Commissioners appointed on the recommendation made by the Committee of Parliament on Banking and Commerce, to enquire into and report on the alleged obstructions of navigable streams and rivers by deals, edgings, saw-dust, and other refuse from saw-mills. These Commissioners were the Hon. H. H. Killaly, a distinguished engineer of Toronto; Mr. R. W. Shepherd, of Montreal; and Mr. John Mather, of Chelsea. These gentlemen did their work very thoroughly, by personal examination and soundings, and by consideration both of the opinions and views of those parties who maintain that the discharge of saw-dust into rivers is not injurious to navigation and should not be prohibited, and the evidence produced to show the contrary, viz., that saw-dust is injurious.

With reference to the statement that if an enactment providing that saw-dust must be kept out of the river Ottawa, be enforced it would compel the proprietors of the Chaudière mills to close and remove elsewhere, the Commissioners remark: —" From our observation of the very little expense attendant upon the collecting and the carrying off of the saw-dust from those mills where it is practised, although by means very insufficient and very inadequate and very imperfect in comparison with what might easily be devised, we are of opinion that the enforcement of it by legislative enactment, would entail upon the mill proprietors generally but a very trifling percentage on their profits. We believe that should it be eventually decided by the Legislature, on more extended information than has yet been adduced as to the injurious effects of saw-dust upon navigation, that none of it shall in any case be allowed to be thrown into rivers, these larger capitalists (at the Chaudière Falls) would soon devise means for otherwise getting rid of the nuisance than by closing up and removing their establishments." At the conclusion of their report they write:—" The views and opinions submitted in this report of all those who maintain that the discharge of saw-dust alone cannot and does not impair the navigation, it may be observed, are confined specially to the

channel of the river; as, for instance, if sufficient depth for the passage of vessels from the Chaudière to the St. Lawrence is left in the channel, the navigation is not impaired. They all admit, and truly, that the saw dust is in the first place lodged in the quiet bays and eddies, generally, along the river (the very places where, as the country and trade increases, may be found the best sites for the various wharves, etc., which may from time to time be required), and that as these become filled up, the current, increased by the contraction of the river, will then carry the saw-dust, still continued to be thrown into the river, at present (1872) at the rate of about eight millions of cubic feet annually of saw-dust alone, independent of slabs, etc., etc., further down, until it is finally deposited, no one knows where.

"For the interests of the city of Ottawa, it is most important that all the river frontage adjoining the city should be kept from being filled up. As, leaving aside any consideration founded upon a through water communication being opened at some future day by the line of the Ottawa river, from the cities of Quebec, Montreal and Ottawa to the 'Great West," it is certain a vast increase in the trade of this city and river, must keep pace with the rapidly increasing prosperity of the country, and that every portion of river frontage in the neighborhood of the city, must become daily of more value, as it will all be required for shipyards, building and repairing slips, wharves, landing places, etc."

The whole tenor of this report is strongly opposed to the pretensions of the lumbermen, and the conclusions are prophetic.

We must remember also that this report was written at the beginning of the year 1873, and that the evils they discovered and commented upon so severely have increased fourfold, as I have shown elsewhere.

There is another point not touched upon directly by the Commissioners, which is this:—The enormous expense it will be to the country to undo the work of the millowners, if they are allowed to have their way much longer. The channel of the Ottawa will have to be cleared and deepened. How is this to be done? It cannot be effected by dredging, for the saw-dust is so light as not to be scooped up like mud or gravel. The channel will have to be enclosed in coffer dams throughout its whole length, and the detritus and saw-dust removed by the wheelbarrow and shovel. This work will be on such a gigantic scale, as to extent and expenditure, as to dwarf the projects of Mr. F. de Lesseps at Suez or even Panama. Is this city and the country generally prepared to pay this much for their whistle, *i. e.*, the goodwill of the water-millers. We think not, even though the whistle will always be heard whistling the favorite air of the party in power, and at the latter's bidding.

There is another reason why we should keep our naturally noble river from pollution. It is the aesthetic one. Sir Charles

Lyell writes that "Rivers have ever been things of vitality and beauty to the poet, silent monitors to the moralist, and agents of comfort and civilization to all mankind;" and Sir Humphrey Davy says, "A full and clear river is, in my opinion, the most poetical object in nature. In England and the United States inland and even coastal waters are protected from pollution by stringent laws. Why should we in Canada be less God-loving than the inhabitants of Egypt and China; Pagans, as they are, they hold sacred their rivers, and thus acknowledge the bounties bestowed by them. We forget that "all are but parts of one stupendous whole," and that "the various productions of nature were not made for us to tread upon." But nature will revenge herself most surely for our selfish and mercenary treatment of her noblest works. "Man, with an axe, marks the earth with ruin," by cutting down our forest trees in a wasteful manner.

"Strange that where nature loved to trace,
As if for gods a dwelling-place,
And every charm and grace hath mixed
Within the Paradise she fixed,
There man, enamoured of distress,
Should mar it into wilderness."

A happy sensibility to the beauties of nature should be cherished in our citizens by their rulers. It engages them to contemplate the Creator in His marvellous works; it purifies and harmonizes the soul and prepares it for moral and intellectual discipline.

Washington Irving gives us the following :—"I think it is an invaluable advantage to be born and brought up in the neighborhood of some grand and noble object of nature—a river, a lake, or a mountain. We make a friendship with it, we in a manner ally ourselves to it for life. It remains an object of our pride and affection, a rallying point to call us home again after all our wanderings." Why should we be deprived of this feeling of pride in what bounteous nature has given to us! Perish the dollars gained at such a sacrifice. Shame on the men who do this act. Josephus mentions a river in Palestine, which, in compliment to the Sabbath, rested every seventh day! Our river rests every day from doing the work which it was created for, according to Lyell, viz: "Acting as an irrigator of the earth's surface, adding alike to the beauty of the landscape and the fertility of the soil; carrying off impurities and forming an available means of communication with the interior of a continent."

I again plead for justice to myself and the river which owes me a living—and would give me one were it not for *force majeure* in the shape of an Order-in-Council. I will conclude in the words of the poet, Waller :—

"Of famous cities we the founders know;
But rivers, old as the seas to which they go,
Are nature's bounty; 'tis of more renown
To make a river than to build a town."

ANTOINE RATTÉ.

OTTAWA, November, 1886.